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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1964

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU

RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001054

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH PARLIAMENT TO REPEAT PRESIDENTIAL VOTE ON
MAY 6

REF: ANKARA 1036 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has scheduled a repeat of the first round of voting for their presidential candidate, FM Abdullah Gul, for May 6. If they are unable to muster a 367 member quorum, as required by a May 1 Constitutional Court decision (reflets), it is unclear whether parliament will continue to conduct business. AKP is determined to forge ahead with debate on two constitutional amendment packages, as well as other business. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) reportedly contends parliament must dissolve if a quorum fails to show for the presidential vote, though some in the party appear prepared to continue to work. If AKP, by hook or by crook, manages to meet the quorum requirement and completes the first round of voting in favor of Gul, AKP opponents may use judicial means to block the process, either by opening a case that could ultimately disband AKP for violating secularism or by raising charges to disqualify Gul himself. End summary and comment.

Repeat of Presidential Election Voting

¶2. (C) AKP continues to negotiate to beg, borrow or steal the 367 MPs required for the May 6 repeat of the first round of presidential voting. If they fail, they either decide the presidential election is over or they try, yet again, on May 19. If they succeed, and if FM Gul is approved, the outcome may not be as clear-cut as they expect. Contacts report AKP opponents may deploy a recently appointed special prosecutor to open a case against AKP for violating secularism that could ultimately lead to the party's demise. Other tactics to discourage AKP's determined pursuit of the presidency include legal charges to bring Gul himself down.

Constitutional Amendment Packages

¶3. (C) In addition to voting on Gul's candidacy on May 6, parliament is scheduled to hold the second vote on a constitutional amendment to Article 67 that will allow two election-related measures, adopted in October 2006, to take effect before the required one-year holding period expires. Parliament approved the amendment in the first vote on May 3; a second round of voting is required. At least 330 MPs must approve the proposal each time. All parties support the Article 67 amendment, which will lower the age of parliamentary candidates from 30 to 25 and place independent

candidates' names on the main ballot instead of separate inserts.

¶4. (C) A second, more controversial constitutional amendment package introduced by AKP and the Motherland Party (Anavatan) is scheduled for a first round of debate on May 5. Under the proposal, Turkey would hold general elections every four (vice five) years; hold direct presidential elections (vice parliament electing president); replace the one, seven-year presidential term with two, five-year terms; and clarify quorum requirements, which the recent Constitutional Court ruling has thrown into confusion.

Risky Business

¶5. (C) AKP has the seats to adopt this second change, and would like it to go to referendum, preferably in concert with the July 22 general election, though they recognize it could slip beyond that date. They are confident voters would approve the amendment package, opening the way for PM Erdogan or another AKP candidate to capture the presidency later in the year. President Sezer is likely to stall action on the measure until parliament dissolves to prevent that from happening. While he is required to act on legislation within 15 days, there is no established limit for presidential action on constitutional amendments. If CHP has its way, parliament will dissolve on May 6 if a 367 quorum fails to muster. If parliament is still in business on May 7, PM Erdogan has said deputies will work until May 17 before adjourning for the general election campaign.

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